

Dear Neighbor,

I am so proud to tell you that the F4U Corsair, the Connecticut-made combat aircraft that helped propel our nation to victory in World War II, is now the official state aircraft. During a celebratory event at the State Capitol's Hall of Flags, veterans and some of the men and women who helped to design and build this remarkable fighting machine witnessed Governor M. Jodi Rell sign into law *SB 585 An Act Designating The F4U Corsair As The State Aircraft*.

As the primary sponsor of this legislation, I thank Governor Rell and the many supporters of this important, historically significant new state law. Most of all, I want to thank Connecticut's military veterans, the brave men and women defending our country today, and all the defense workers, past and present, whose contributions help make our state and our country strong. This new law is a tribute to them.

Besides designating this combat aircraft as the state's official aircraft, the new law calls for the Governor to proclaim May 29th of each year as Corsair Day to commemorate the first flight of the F4U Corsair, and to honor the workers at United Aircraft, Pratt & Whitney, Hamilton Standard and Vought-Sikorsky who built it.

It is especially fitting that we designate the F4U Corsair as the state's official aircraft this year, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. This plane, one of the most successful combat aircraft used in World War II, was built right here in Connecticut and this is something we can all be proud of. It is also a symbol of our nation's strength and power for its military use, for the companies that created it, and for the people who flew it. It is also a symbol of greater freedom for a generation of women who responded to our nation's desperate need for workers. To a large extent, what these women did then is responsible for how the world sees women today. This new law is a tribute to them, as well.

It is my pleasure to share with you some information about F4U Corsair and the role it played in our nation's, and our state's, history. Enjoy!

George L. "Doc" Gunther
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State of Connecticut

By Her Excellency M. Jodi Rell, Governor: a

PROCLAMATION

Preceding World War I, military strength relied primarily on the individual country's troop numbers, resulting in millions of casualties during massive global conflicts. World War II, with the end of aeronautic aviation's infancy, caused military air superiority to become one of the first and most important United States military goals during armed conflict.

In February 1938, the United States Navy published a request for a new, high performance, carrier-based fighter plane with capabilities surpassing any plane which was currently in production or in developmental testing. Led by Chief Engineer Rex B. Beilsel, the Connecticut-based group United Aircraft Corporation, through its Vought-Sikorsky division in association with the Pratt & Whitney and Hamilton Standard divisions, designed the F4U Corsair.

The Corsair design featured the Pratt & Whitney XR2800 Double Wasp engine, at that time the most powerful engine ever built for a fighter plane and the Hamilton Standard designed 13 foot, 4 inch three-blade propeller. The most recognizable aspect of the Corsair was the inverted gull wing, which bent the wing down from the root and then back up to the tip, increasing pilot visibility and improved aerodynamics, with the first retractable landing gear.

On May 29, 1940, Vought-Sikorsky tested the prototype “XF4U-1” in its initial flight at the Vought airfield in Stratford, Connecticut. The test flight eventually led to the United States Navy receiving the first production of the F4U Corsair on July 31, 1942. The Marine Corps declared the Corsair “ready for combat” in February of 1943 as a land-based aircraft, while the Navy made the declaration for carrier operations in September.

During the course of World War II, the inverted gull-winged F4U Corsair flew 64,051 missions from aircraft carriers. As the only major combat aircraft of World War II produced by a single state, the F4U Corsair is a prime example of the achievements of Connecticut's workforce through the cooperation of United Aircraft, Pratt & Whitney, Hamilton Standard and the Vought-Sikorsky companies.

Therefore, In recognition of the 65th Anniversary of the initial flight of the F4U Corsair, Connecticut's state aircraft, and in accordance with the laws of the State of Connecticut, I hereby proclaim May 29, 2005, to be

CORSAIR DAY

Bringing the F4U Corsair to the Public's Attention

Supporters of this legislation knew from the very beginning that one of the benefits of designating the F4U Corsair the official state aircraft would be to instill a sense of well-placed pride in future generations of Connecticut residents. Hopefully, media accounts of “Corsair Day” every May 29th will prompt them to take an interest and learn something about the many contributions Connecticut's defense industry has made to our nation.

But, first we had to bring our legislation to the attention of the General Assembly's Veterans Committee, which held a public hearing on the bill in February. Those who attended the public hearing to show their support included:

- **Lou Knapp** – Town Historian, President of the Stratford Historical Society, and Historian for the Connecticut Air & Space Center, Inc. in Stratford. A 45-year employee of Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft, he helped design the Vought Corsair and more than 20 helicopters.
- **Craig McBurney** – Owner of Connecticut Corsair, a state-based company dedicated to the restoration and flight of the F4U Corsair. Mr. McBurney is an Air Force Veteran, a pilot, and an aircraft mechanic. His company is working to highlight the contributions of the organizations that built the Corsair by having them become involved in the restoration project. Several Connecticut-based companies have already signed on as sponsors of the Corsair restoration, with the hopes that many more will follow.
- **Jerry O'Neill** – Pilot, aviation historian and former Associate Curator at the New England Air Museum, aviation writer and aerial photographer, air boss and air show operations professional who has flown 78 different types of aircraft.

- **Don Richardson** – Flight Test Engineer who started his career in 1942 who worked for Vought and several other firms, including Links Simulators, Sperry Gyroscope, and Sikorsky Aircraft.
- **Nick Mainero** – WWII Corsair pilot, resident of Bridgeport, flew 51 missions and received a Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross.
- **Annette Lasorda** – WWII factory worker at Chance Vought Aircraft, who worked on the wings of the Corsair and presently volunteers at the aircraft restoration shop for the Connecticut Air & Space Center in Stratford, CT.

Facts About the F4U Corsair

The first flight of the F4U Corsair took place in May of 1940 from the Bridgeport Municipal Airport, now Sikorsky Memorial Airport. On a test flight to Hartford later that year, the plane averaged 405 miles per hour, the first production aircraft to do so.

The Navy ordered 584 F4U Corsairs in June of 1941. Production did not stop until January 1953. Ultimately, the Connecticut defense industry built 12,571 of these aircraft, including upgraded versions. Most were built in Stratford, CT.

In the Pacific War, Corsair pilots downed an estimated 125,000 Japanese aircraft. Later, the F4U Corsair was flown during the Korean War. It was most recently flown in combat by foreign operators during the 1969 war between El Salvador and Honduras.

Today, fewer than 90 F4U Corsairs exist in museums. About one dozen have been restored and can be flown.

